

College Guide for Students with Disabilities

Like any other prospective college student, students with disabilities will likely have questions about the transition from high school to college. Students with disabilities making the transition to college will find that the procedures for accessing accommodations are different from those at the high school level. At the collegiate level, students with disabilities serve as their own self-advocates regarding their status as an individual with a disability. The management of obtaining disability documentation, requesting services, and disclosing a disability is the responsibility of the student.

For example, students with disabilities at the collegiate level must seek out the appropriate office on campus (usually “Office of Disability Services”) to inquire about the procedure for accessing accommodations. Upon disclosing a disability, students will be asked to submit requests for accommodations in writing along with documentation of their disability according to the standards of the university or college. Requirements for documentation of a disability may vary by institution, and students may be asked to obtain disability documentation at their own expense. Generally, students with disabilities approved for accommodations will notify each instructor of their needs and coordinate the effort to access accommodations and services.

Unlike high school, students attending college who are 18 years old or older have the same privacy and confidentiality rights afforded to adults. Therefore, college professors and administrators must speak directly to the students themselves and may not, with certain exceptions, talk with parents or guardians about a student’s activities without written permission from the student. Whereas parents used to be the student’s primary advocate, the student must now engage in self-advocacy. This is an important life skill for young adults.



An Overview

There is a wealth of information available to students with disabilities. So much information is available, in fact, that it can be overwhelming to wade through it all. To aid in the process of gathering and sorting information, CFNC has put together some topics that may be of interest to students with disabilities and their families. In addition, the Resource Guide at the back of this publication has some contact information for relevant organizations that will provide more details on topics of interest.

CFNC.org

Helping you plan, apply, and pay for college

College
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The Laws

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 ("Section 504"), as amended, Titles II and III of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008 (collectively "ADA") prohibit discrimination based on a disability. In terms of higher education, this means that as long as a student meets admission requirements, a college may not deny the student admission simply because the student has a disability. A college may deny admission to any student, regardless of ability, who does not meet admission requirements or essential requirements for a specific program.*

According to both Section 504 and the ADA, a "person with a disability" is anyone with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of his or her major life activities, such as caring for one's self, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, reading, writing, and thinking. The definition covers a range of disabilities from psychological disabilities to chronic health problems. Students with disabilities must establish that they are substantially limited in this manner and that they need reasonable accommodations.

As far as college entrance tests, according to the U.S. Department of Education's *Transition of Students With Disabilities to Postsecondary Education: A Guide for High School Educators*, "federal law requires changes to the testing conditions that are necessary to allow a student with a disability to participate as long as the changes do not fundamentally alter the exam or create financial or administrative burdens." Some examples of testing accommodations include providing materials in large print or Braille, extended testing time, and allowing tape-recorded responses.

Colleges should not ask questions related to a student's disability status prior to the student's admission. After the student is admitted, colleges are not required to ask about disabilities and students are not required to disclose their disability. Some students may not need accommodations for their disability and may choose not to disclose that information to the college. In that case, the college would not get involved unless the student approached the Office of Disability Services on campus and requested information on accommodations. Students may only receive accommodations after the time they disclose their disability for that semester (e.g., not retroactively) and will need to request accommodations each semester thereafter.

* U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, *Transition of Students With Disabilities to Postsecondary Education: A Guide for High School Educators* (Washington, DC: 2007), <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transitionguide.html>.



Choosing a College

For students with disabilities, one of the most important factors in applying to college is to start early! Allow extra time to research services available on campus and learn what documentation is required to receive services. There are many books on choosing a college, a couple of which are highlighted here.

Resources for Choosing a College

Mangrum, Charles T., II, and Strichart, Stephen S., eds. *Colleges with Programs for Students with Learning Disabilities or Attention Deficit Disorders*. 8th ed. New Jersey: Peterson's Guides, 2006.

Reiff, Henry B. *Self-Advocacy Skills for Students with Learning Disabilities, Making it Happen in College and Beyond: A Resource for Students, Parents, and Guidance Counselors*. New York: National Professional Resources, Inc., 2007.

The best way to start researching colleges is to visit in person or online. Information on all of North Carolina's colleges can be found at CFNC.org. You can also call toll free 866-866-CFNC to speak with a representative about colleges and financial aid.

If it is possible to visit a campus in person, make sure to contact the admissions office to arrange a tour. Ask the admissions officer how to contact the Office of Disability Services on campus. These offices often have different names on individual campuses, but usually contain the phrase "disability services" or "student support services." Pick up business cards to contact college administrators later if necessary.

Documentation

Remember, it is the student's responsibility to contact the Office of Disability Services on campus if accommodations are needed. The student will then need to provide the type of documentation required by the institution. Generally, the documentation must be current and must state the disability as diagnosed by a qualified professional on company letterhead. Colleges may want to see documentation of past services provided at the student's high school as well as any recommendations for accommodations for postsecondary education. Acceptable documentation of a disability may include physicians' statements, medical reports, psychological evaluations, and reports from the Division of Services for the Blind, Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and Vocational Rehabilitation.

Accommodations for College Entrance Tests

A student with a documented disability may be eligible for accommodations on college entrance tests such as ACT, SAT, PSAT/NMSQT, or Advanced Placement (AP) Tests.

For information on ACT, contact Services for Students with Disabilities at www.act.org/aap/disab, or by telephone at (319) 337-1332 or TDD at (319) 337-1701.

By mail: ACT
Services for Students with Disabilities
500 ACT Drive
PO Box 168
Iowa City, IA 52243-0168

Contact College Board's Services for Students with Disabilities for information on AP testing, SAT, and PSAT/NMSQT at www.collegeboard.com/ssd or by telephone at (609) 771-7137 or TTY (609) 882-4118.

By mail: College Board
Services for Students with Disabilities
PO Box 6226
Princeton, NJ 08541-6226

Accommodations in College

Colleges have the responsibility to provide reasonable accommodations requested by students with documented disabilities as defined by law. Accommodations for students with disabilities can vary as widely as each individual student. Examples may include extra time to complete a test, special seating arrangements, sign language interpreters, note-taking services, distraction-reduced environments, readers, computer access for recording answers to test questions, alternative test formats, and other modifications that would allow students with disabilities to have equal access. In addition to academic accommodations, campus life accommodations can include making college events, facilities, and housing accessible.

Tips for Success

- Make contact with disability office directors early in the semester to discuss accommodations.
- Take a freshman seminar or college student success class.
- Make sure to understand all of the rigors of college life, including academic as well as social.
- Get involved on campus!
- Maintain regular contact with academic advisors and disability support services.
- Most importantly, if problems arise, seek solutions early! Don't wait until the end of the semester to speak with an advisor.



Resource Guide

Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD)

www.AHEAD.org

Visit AHEAD.org to find resources for parents and students. Answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs) and an alphabetized list of transition resources are located on their website.

AHEAD

107 Commerce Center Drive, Suite 204
Huntersville, NC 28078

(704) 947-7779 (voice)

(704) 948-7779 (fax)

North Carolina Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (Voc Rehab)

<http://dvr.dhhs.state.nc.us>

A Division of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Voc Rehab works with federal, state, and local advocacy groups to promote the involvement of business in maximizing employment of individuals with disabilities.

North Carolina Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services Client Assistance Program

2801 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-2801

800-689-9090 (voice)

(919) 855-3579 (TTY)

(919) 733-7968 (fax)

North Carolina Division of Services for the Blind

www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dsb

Information for teens on career counseling, summer transition programs, vocational and college training, and job placement can be found in Services for Teens on the website listed above.

Division of Services for the Blind

309 Ashe Avenue – Fisher Building
2601 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-2601

(919) 733-9822 (voice)

866-222-1546 (toll free)

(919) 733-9769 (fax)

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